# SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR COMMUNICATING EXPRESSIVE IMAGES FOR MEETINGS

1   **Cross Reference To Related Application(s)**

2        This application is a continuation-in-part of application Serial Number

3   09/955,044, filed September 19, 2001 entitled A FRAME FOR COMMUNICATING

4   EXPRESSIVE INFORMATION FOR MEETINGS, which is incorporated herein by

5   reference.

6   **Technical Field**

7        The technical field relates to communication systems, and, in particular, to a

8   system and method for communicating expressive images for meetings.

9   **Background**

10        Remote meetings such as telephone conferences have long been crippled because

11   participants cannot effectively convey or exchange important expressive information with

12   the whole group. During a remote presentation, very often no one voices confusions or

13   concerns, because each participant, unable to observe other participants' similar reactions,

14   commonly thinks that he/she is the only one who is confused, concerned, etc., and is

15   therefore reluctant to speak up. Similarly, a speaker making a remote presentation

16   typically is unsure when to stop explaining, since he/she cannot readily observe the

17   audience's reactions such as dawning comprehension, growing impatience, or dismissive

18   boredom. As a result, important questions and objections are often not raised, and too

19   much time is spent explaining what is already understood.

20        Similar dynamics may take place during a cross-cultural group meeting when

21   participants cannot confidently interpret the signals that other participants send through

22   their facial expressions, gestures, stance, and general demeanor. Participants may feel so

23   isolated that they refrain from voicing their contributions to discussions, while leaders

24   may have trouble setting meeting pace appropriately and leading discussions effectively.

25        Some existing remote meeting tools enable participants to send short messages

26   containing text and/or icons to a leader or a moderator of the meeting. However, the

27   messages are typically available only to the leader or the moderator, and other

28   participants cannot use the messages to gauge the flow and tenor of the other participants'

29   reactions. This makes it impossible for participants to participate in and contribute to the

30   meeting's group dynamics as they would in a face-to-face meeting.

31        Remote meeting participants sometimes use text chat to augment telephone

32   conferencing. However, two important limitations relate to the text chat. First, in many

1    cases the text chat is not visible to the entire group (who may be completely unaware that

2    the text chat is taking place), but serves as a sidebar conversation among a subset of the

3    participants, who may be drawn together by their communication, but who are also

4    isolated from the others who are left out. Therefore, when text chat is used in the absence

5    of any means of ongoing communication among the group as a whole, it can serves more

6    to fragment the meeting than to contribute to a healthy, robust inclusive group dynamic.

7    Second, the text chat tends to be keyboard-intensive, requiring the same kind of attention

8    and mental processing as the meeting's main discussion. Therefore, the text chat often

9    competes with the main discussion of the meeting for the participants' mind share. When

10    feelings run high or a topic under discussion calls for concentration, the participants

11    generally chose one or the other: they either abandon the text chat, or they abandon the

12    main discussion and simply vent feelings in the text chat. Third, as participation

13    increases, the speed with which information in a chat window scrolls up and off the page

14    increases, *i.e.*, the more people contribute, the faster the contributions disappear, and the

15    harder for the participants to follow the text chat, especially when they are simultaneously

16    trying to follow the thread of the main presentation or discussion. Accordingly, while a

17    text chat window may be adequate for communicating reactions of a few participants

18    among themselves, the text chat is inadequate for communicating expressive information

19    among a large group of participants.

20         Remote meeting participants have also tried to use video transmission as a

21    medium for expressing and exchanging reactions. However, video is bandwidth

22    intensive. Therefore, using video to provide visual feedback requires fast computer

23    processors and network connections. Even when high-speed computer processors and

24    network connections are used, delay ("lag") tends to be present in varying degrees,

25    making it difficult if not impossible to correctly interpret which exact antecedent event

26    triggered a particular response. Furthermore, video cameras do not provide feedback

27    effectively because expressive information is typically communicated through complex,

28    highly-nuanced, and language/cultural-specific expressions, postures, and gestures. Even

29    if network bandwidth and computer power are able to accommodate multiple video

30    transmissions, trying to watch an array of video windows proves to be inadequate. The

31    signals (intended messages) each person sends are moreover subject to being distorted

32    and obscured by many meaningless expressions, postures, and actions (visual "noise")

33    which are simply part of living and working. Unlike professional actors who can focus

34    entirely on conveying a specific message through a camera, meeting participants must

focus on the subject of the meeting and the meeting itself.. Accordingly, the nuances of body language that depend on physical proximity and eye contact simply cannot be conveyed through independent videos. In addition, trying to follow multiple video images simultaneously may be distracting and tiresome for participants.

## Summary

The embodiments described herein overcome the disadvantages described above. A system for communicating expressive images for a meeting includes a plurality of computers controlled by meeting participants and a storage device capable of storing one or more collections of expressive images of each meeting participant. The system further includes a software application enabling each meeting participant to select an expressive image from the one or more collections of expressive images and a network connecting the plurality of computers. Each meeting participant communicates the selected expressive image to other meeting participants over the network during the meeting.

A corresponding method for communicating expressive images for a meeting includes launching a software application on a computer controlled by a meeting participant, connecting the computer to other meeting participants' computers over a network, enabling the meeting participant to select an expressive image from one or more collections of expressive images stored in a storage device, and communicating the selected first expressive image to other meeting participants' computers over the network during the meeting.

A computer readable medium providing instruction for communicating expressive images for meetings. The instructions includes launching a software application on a computer controlled by a meeting participant, connecting the computer to other meeting participants' computers over a network, enabling the meeting participant to select a first expressive image from one or more collections of expressive images stored in a storage device, and communicating the selected first expressive image to other meeting participants' computers over the network during the meeting.

## Description of the Drawings

The detailed description will refer to the following drawings, wherein like numerals refer to like elements, and wherein:

Figure 1 illustrates an embodiment of hardware components of a computer that may be used in connection with an exemplary method for communicating expressive images for meetings;

1    Figure 2 shows an embodiment of an exemplary photo display window and photo
2    control window that may be used in connection with an exemplary method for displaying
3    expressive images for meetings;

4    Figures 3-5 illustrate embodiments of exemplary network connection models that
5    may be used in connection with an exemplary method for communicating expressive
6    images for meetings; and

7    Figure 6 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of an exemplary method for
8    communicating expressive images for meetings.

9    **Detailed Description**

10    A method and system use networked computers to allow meeting participants to
11    communicate expressive images for remote meetings, or for cross-cultural or other face-
12    to-face meetings where participants cannot confidently and correctly interpret the signals
13    that other participants send through their facial expressions, gestures, stance, and general
14    demeanor. Meeting participants may select and display photographs of themselves to
15    other meeting participants, therefore communicating expressive images during meetings
16    without interrupting the discussion and presentations that are taking place. The
17    expressive images may be transmitted over a network to other meeting participants.
18    Every meeting participant may view the transmitted expressive images displayed on a
19    computer connected to the network. Alternatively, a meeting participant can select one or
20    more meeting participants and only transmit the expressive images to a few computers
21    operated by the selected meeting participants.

22    The system enables remote and local meeting participants in a meeting to
23    exchange expressive personal information, referred to as murmur information. Meeting
24    participants can express their own reactions and insights, and can receive other
25    participants' communications through the same system with a good likelihood of
26    correctly interpreting other participants' reactions and insights. Murmur information is
27    traditionally provided by the participants' expressions, stance, actions, and verbal asides
28    in face-to-face interactions. Murmur information may include some or all of the
29    following: each participant's reactions to a subject matter of a discussion; status in
30    relation to a meeting, such as waiting to ask a question or being briefly called away;
31    thoughts; intentions; and other relevant activities. Murmur information may be
32    communicated to the entire group without interrupting the main threads of the meeting by
33    any of the participants. Speakers, moderators, and participants may all rely on murmur

1 information for guidance in working effectively with the group's continually-unfolding

2 dynamics.

3      The system is more advantageous than transmitting video when used to enable all

4 meeting participants to engage in ongoing communication among themselves because

5 image display may be less distracting than video. For example, when video is used to

6 show a main speaker, and expressive images are used for all other participants,

7 participants attention may be drawn primarily to the main speaker, and secondarily to any

8 image-changes made by other participants. This method encourages an appropriate

9 balance of attention. The system also reduces miscues and misunderstandings. For

10 example, when someone in a video conference makes a face at a computer problem, the

11 speaker may mistakenly assume that the expression is a reaction to what the speaker said.

12 That misunderstanding would not arise if this system were being used instead of video,

13 because the participant's grimace at his or her computer would not be seen, and the

14 participant would not deliberately send an expressive image communicating an irrelevant

15 reaction. Similarly, a delay in seeing the expression due to network congestion may also

16 lead to misinterpretation of the expression. Because the system is far less bandwidth

17 intensive than video, the incidence of delays due to network congestion is far less with the

18 system than with video, with a corresponding decrease in misunderstandings due to

19 delays. Further, because with the system each individual deliberately chooses when to

20 display selected images, and because individuals can discuss and be take into

21 consideration whatever degree of delay various participants are experiencing, images can

22 be selected which have a more prolonged relevance to the discussion, as opposed to the

23 fleeting and very time-sensitive expressions captured by video, further reducing the

24 opportunities for misinterpretations. In addition, communicating expressive images

25 offers greater precision and control for meeting participants, because the meeting

26 participants can pre-screen and select images to accurately convey what they choose to

27 express. Furthermore, communicating expressive images requires less ongoing self-

28 consciousness from the meeting participants, since they are not "on camera" with their

29 every move subject to scrutiny and potential misinterpretation. Additionally, sending

30 expressive images is much less resource-intensive than sending video. As a result, many

31 meeting participants may be able to exchange expressive images without fast computer

32 processors or fast network connections. An additional benefit of using expressive images

33 prepared in advance over real-time video is that expressive images eliminate the

34 participants' need to prepare their appearance and the appearance of the space around

1    them to be appropriate to the meeting. This is especially beneficial in cases where several
2    remote meeting with different "dress codes" are scheduled with little or no time between.
3    In stead of needing to change his or her real-life appearance, the participant can simply
4    select photos that show him or her dressed in the appropriate degree of formality. In
5    addition, since the participants' work space need not function as a video studio, the work
6    space can retain whatever tools and materials that are needed for work, regardless of
7    whether or not the tools and materials would present an impression of clutter if seen in
8    video.

9          The system also offers a better alternative to emoticons because meeting
10   participant can select photographs of themselves, which serve as a visual and memory aid
11   for the meeting. Therefore, the system overcomes the sense of faceless anonymity that
12   can be a disadvantage in remote meetings.

13         Furthermore, the system provides a way for remote meeting participants and
14   remote team members to follow the same behavior pattern that people use face-to-face,
15   *i.e.*, beginning with a few pleasant, fairly neutral and somewhat guarded expressions, and
16   gradually expanding the range of expression as the meeting participants know each other
17   well enough that their expressions will be correctly interpreted.

18         A subtle but significant difference exists between using expressive images, such
19   as still photographs, to illustrate a person's reactions, and using video intended to capture
20   the person's real-time expressions. The distinction is related to the need to distinguish
21   between significant expressions (signals) and meaningless actions (noise). Any and all
22   movements, including facial changes, stance, movement, etc., may be either signal or
23   noise, depending on whether they are intended to convey meaning or are simply related to
24   living and working. In face-to-face interactions, highly-developed social conventions
25   enable persons to frame each action as meaningful or meaningless, and insofar as other
26   individuals are conversant with the same social conventions they are able to correctly
27   filter out some actions as meaningless and focus on other actions as meaningful. Most of
28   the social conventions related to framing actions as meaningful or meaningless have not
29   yet been adapted for use through an unedited video medium. Therefore, video
30   communication may contain a high ratio of noise (meaningless actions) to signal
31   (meaningful actions), and people observing others in an unedited video may not be able to
32   distinguish clearly between the two. Therefore, people may be burdened by not being
33   able to preemptively dismiss the large percentage of actions that are meaningless. In
34   these circumstances the flow of ambiguous input commonly becomes so overwhelming

1    that participants often resort to ignoring the input altogether, thus losing the signal along

2    with the noise.

3         Using illustrative photographs prepared in advance solves the noise problem,

4    since meaningless actions are not observed. Using pre-prepared illustrative photographs

5    shows the individuals themselves and their styles of expressing themselves, which

6    enables other meeting participants to envision and become acquainted with each other in

7    ways that are not empowered by the use of stylized icons.

8         The system for communicating expressive images for remote meetings includes

9    one or more computers connected through a network. The computers may be located

10   remotely and controlled by meeting participants. The computers may alternatively be

11   computing devices with reduced functionality for use in special circumstances, for

12   example, when a meeting participant is traveling. Such a reduced functionality

13   computing device may display text associated with images, such as comments or

14   descriptive titles which participants may assign to their prepared photos, without

15   displaying the images themselves.

16        Figure 1 illustrates exemplary hardware components of a computer 100 that may

17   be used to in connection with the system and an exemplary method for communicating

18   expressive images for meetings. The computer 100 includes a connection with a network

19   118, such as the Internet or other type of computer or telephone networks. The network

20   enables the computers 100 to send and receive files and other information. The computer

21   100 typically includes a memory 102, a secondary storage device 112, a processor 114, an

22   input device 116, a display device 110, and an output device 108.

23        The memory 102 may include random access memory (RAM) or similar types of

24   memory. The memory 102 may be connected to the network 118 by a web browser 106.

25   The web browser 106 makes a connection by way of the world wide web (WWW) to

26   other computers, and receives information from the other computers that is displayed on

27   the computer 100. The secondary storage device 112 may include a hard disk drive,

28   floppy disk drive, CD-ROM drive, or other types of non-volatile data storage, and it may

29   correspond with various databases or other resources. The expressive images of meeting

30   participants may be stored in the secondary storage device 112 on each participant's

31   computer 100. The processor 114 may execute applications or other information stored in

32   the memory 102, the secondary storage 112, or received from the Internet or other

33   network 118. For example, the processor 114 may execute a software application 107

34   used in connection with an exemplary method for communicating expressive images for

1    meeting. The input device 116 may include any device for entering data into the

2    computer 100, such as a keyboard, key pad, cursor-control device, touch-screen (possibly

3    with a stylus), or microphone. The display device 110 may include any type of device for

4    presenting visual image, such as, for example, a computer monitor, flat-screen display,

5    television screen, or display panel. Expressive images of meeting participants may be

6    displayed on the display device 110. The output device 108 may include any type of

7    device for presenting data in hard copy format, such as a printer, and other types of output

8    devices including speakers or any device for providing data in audio form. The computer

9    100 can possibly include multiple input devices, output devices, and display devices.

10          Although the computer 100 is depicted with various components, one skilled in

11    the art will appreciate that this computer can contain additional or different components.

12    In addition, although aspects of an implementation consistent with the method for

13    communicating expressive images are described as being stored in memory, one skilled in

14    the art will appreciate that these aspects can also be stored on or read from other types of

15    computer program products or computer-readable media, such as secondary storage

16    devices, including hard disks, floppy disks, or CD-ROM; a carrier wave from the Internet

17    or other network; or other forms of RAM or ROM. The computer-readable media may

18    include instructions for controlling the computer 100 to perform a particular method.

19          Each meeting participant may have access to a computer 100 connected to other

20    meeting participants' computers 100 through a network 118. More than one participant

21    may share a computer 100, in which case the expressive images displayed may be

22    considered as representing the participants' reactions as a group unless otherwise

23    specified, and the expressive images may in fact include all of the people so sharing. The

24    software application 107 on the computers 100 enables the meeting participants to select

25    images for display on other meeting participants' computers 100. The software

26    application 107 also enables each meeting participant to view the images displayed on his

27    or her computer 100. The software application 107 preferably generates two windows. A

28    photo display window displays expressive images of the meeting participants. A photo

29    control window enables each participant to select expressive images from his or her

30    personal image collections to be displayed over the network 118 during a meeting. The

31    meeting participants may express real-time responses to meeting events and discussions

32    by displaying different expressive images over the network 118.

33          The display device 110 of each participant's computer 100 may display multiple

34    expressive images of other meeting participants in the meeting. A participant's name

1    may be associated with his or her image for identification. The images and names may be

2    shown positioned in any meeting formation on the user's display device 110, such as

3    around a conference table, in a "horseshoe" theater seating, or other formations.

4        Figure 2 shows an exemplary photo display window 200 and photo control

5    window 300, preferably generated by the software application 107, that may be used in

6    connection with the system and exemplary method for displaying expressive images for

7    meetings. The photo display window 200 offers different window orientation options for

8    displaying expressive images 210 of meeting participants. In this example, photographs

9    of five meeting participants are displayed. The expressive images 210 may be pre-

10   selected by each meeting participant using a photo control window 300 on each

11   participant's computer 100.

12       Each meeting participant may have at least one collection of one or more images

13   210, such as digital photographs. Expressive images 210 may be selected by each

14   meeting participant using a drag and drop picture list 220. Each image 210 may convey

15   an expression, gesture, or other responses, such as applauding or glaring. Applauding, as

16   a repetitive motion that may be interruptive in nature, may be displayed as a small video

17   clip set repeating as long as the image is displayed. The images 210 may also convey

18   emotions such as looking dubious or enthusiastic. In addition, the images 210 may show

19   no one in the photograph, indicating that the person has temporarily moved away from

20   the telephone or desk.

21       A meeting participant may have one collection of images 210 to use in multiple

22   remote meetings. Alternatively, a meeting participant may have several collections

23   intended for different purposes. For example, a meeting participant may have one

24   collection of images 210 for formal meetings, showing the meeting participant formally

25   dressed. The meeting participant may have another collection of images 210 for less

26   formal meetings, showing the meeting participant in more casual attire. A sales person

27   who works with customer companies with different dress codes may have different

28   collections of images 210 corresponding to each of the dress codes. Similarly, a person

29   working with groups in different countries, cultures, and languages may have multiple

30   collections of images 210, each reflecting the body stances, gestures, and facial

31   expressions associated with a specific language.

32       The expressive images 210 may be photographs of a meeting participant.

33   However, other images 210 may be used, such as humorous images showing a sleeping

34   animal to suggest that the meeting is putting the participant to sleep. In addition,

1   drawings and video clips may be included in the collections. The images 210 may be

2   captured in a variety of ways. For example, photographs of meeting participants may be

3   captured during a meeting using a digital camera. Scanned hard-copy images and digital

4   drawings may also be used.

5         The collections of images 210 may be saved in a storage device on a server (not

6   shown). The images 210 can be accessed by the remote computers 100 during a meeting

7   or downloaded by the remote computers 100 at the start of a meeting. The collections of

8   images 210 may also be saved in a storage device 112 on each meeting participant's

9   computer 100 for sharing during a meeting. Alternatively, the collections of images 210

10   may be stored on removable media. Each meeting participant's computer 100 may

11   optionally store images of people that the participant meets frequently.

12         With continued reference to Figure 2, the photo control window 300 may include

13   a comments section 230 that allows the individual to enter text labels to be associated

14   with the expressive images 210. For example, the phrase "Bravo!" may be associated

15   with an image of a participant applauding, "Hmmm" may be associated with an image of

16   a participant looking thoughtful and non-committal. The text labels may be part of the

17   associating images 210. Alternatively, the text labels may be separate components of the

18   system. More than one set of text labels may be associated with each collection of

19   images, allowing the same image 210 to be used with different labels. The meeting

20   participants may select the set of labels to be used for a specific meeting. For example,

21   labels such as "Bravo!" and "It seems unlikely," are suitable for formal meeting, whereas

22   labels such as "Way to go!" and "Not a chance!" are typically used for informal meetings.

23   The text labels may be provided in more than one language. The meeting participants

24   may select the preferred language to be used for a specific meeting.

25         The text labels may be relatively long or as short as "Yes!" or "No way!". The

26   text labels may serve the same purposes as muttered comments serve in face-to-face

27   meetings, *i.e.*, allowing participants to interject comments or questions in "asides"

28   without formally interrupting the speaker and taking the floor.

29         The photo control window 300 may include configurable predefined standard text

30   labels that may be selected from a drop-down menu. A team of participants may discuss,

31   select, modify, add to, and agree on the definitions and uses for the predefined text labels

32   for their team. The predefined text labels may be especially useful for cross-cultural

33   teams that often face difficulties in communication. For example, one person's phrase for

34   routine disagreement may be "That might be so," while another's may be "That's crazy!",

1 and the difference in the different ways of expressing the same intention (routine

2 disagreement) can cause misunderstandings. The default text labels may provide a

3 common defined set of signals that all team members understand. Some examples of the

4 predefined text labels are shown in Table 1.

5 Table 1

| I have some concerns |
|---|
| Time constraints – how shall we pursue this? |
| Excellent work! |
| I need clarification before we move on |
| I have a question |
| I have an idea |
| I have a suggestion |
| I'd like to comment on this topic |
| I'd like to introduce a new topic |
| I volunteer for that |
| I disagree |
| I agree |

6

7 With continued reference to Figure 2, the comment section 230 may also include

8 status comments that indicate the participant's status in the meeting. For example,

9 "Away" indicates the participant is away from the meeting for an unspecified length of

10 time and will not hear what takes place until returning, "Break?" suggests taking a break,

11 "BRB" indicates be right back (away but intends to return promptly), and "AFK"

12 indicates away from keyboard.

13 The photo control window 300 may also include a control device 240 to resize

14 the selected image 210. The selected image 210 may then be uploaded 250, for example,

15 at the start of a meeting. The selected image 210 may first be displayed as a thumbnail

16 280 before being uploaded. The images 210 may also be cleared using a clear icon 260.

17 The photo control window 300 may optionally include other types of custom settings 270,

18 including a control 290 enabling or disabling a web camera.

1    Video cameras may be used with the computers 100 to allow the meeting

2    participants to capture and display real-time video during a meeting. Examples of real-

3    time video include selected video frames or single frames captured at pre-set intervals.

4    The system may distinguish a speaker or key people in the audience from other

5    meeting participants by displaying the expressive images 210 of the speaker or the key

6    people in different color, in larger sizes, or in better resolution.

7    Participants may later be added to a meeting and their expressive images 210 may

8    be arranged side by side horizontally, vertically, or in other arrangements, depending on

9    spaces available on a particular display device 110.

10   The system may take advantage of color whenever color display devices 110 are

11   available. Color is eye-catching, and enables participants to receive and interpret

12   expressive information more effectively. For example, even if fifty murmur frames 200

13   appear on a display device 110, human eyes may readily recognize drastic color changes.

14   Color coding may be standard. For example, green indicates agreement, red signals

15   hostility, and white represents iciness. Color coding particularly benefits a speaker.

16   Facing the display 110 with multiple expressive images 210 of meeting participants, the

17   speaker may acknowledge an overall change of color from corners of his/her eyes, thus

18   receiving feedback without having to study each individual image 210. Color coding is

19   also useful when a large number of meeting participants are involved in a meeting. Each

20   meeting participant's photograph may be correlated with color coding. The speaker or

21   any other meeting participant can, for example, click on an area in red to view the actual

22   images 210 of the meeting participants showing signs of disapproval.

23   In a face-to-face meeting, participants' laughter at a joke typically fades to a

24   smile, then to a look of polite attention before being replaced by other expressions.

25   Similarly, the system may have a default "baseline image" chosen by the user to represent

26   his or her neutral state, and a "fade rate" that is set to control how long selected

27   expressive images 210 will be displayed before changing back to the default baseline

28   image. The participant may configure the default "fade rate" according to his/her

29   preference, and may also override the default "fade rate" for a particular situation. For

30   example, clicking to choose "applause" may show a meeting participant applauding for a

31   few seconds. The same may be true of other expressive images 210 and text labels. The

32   default "fade rate" for text labels may be configured separately from the expressive

33   images 210.

One or more audio "frames" may be included with, for example, sound effects, background music, or various kinds of ambient noise, as long as the noises do not interrupt the main thread of the meeting and are clearly associated with the participant who triggers the noises. Additionally, appropriate audio separation may be provided to distinguish such an audio frame from the main audio discussion (for example, through the use of surround-sound that allows the audio frame to be assigned an audio "location" unmistakably distinct from the main discussion), so that the participants may appropriately use the audio frame for low-volume muttered (literally "murmured") comments.

Figures 3-5 illustrate exemplary network connection models that may be used in connection with the system and exemplary method for communicating expressive images 210 for meetings. With respect to Figure 3, an embodiment of the system 50 for communicating expressive images for meetings is shown. Each meeting participant's computer 100, i.e., a client computer in this example, is preferably connected to a server 310 or other network server. Each client computer 100 launches the software application 107 at the start of a remote meting, and selects a predetermined "meeting room" on the server 310 for sharing images 210. When a meeting participant updates his or her image 210, the updated image 210 may be sent to the server 310 using, for example, file transfer protocol (FTP) or hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). Other meeting participant's computer 100 may update the images 210 from the server 310 at a pre-set interval.

Figure 4 illustrates a peer-to-peer model of the system 50 with a designated host. Multiple meeting participants' computers 100, client computers in this example, are connected to a designated host computer 410. Each client computer 100 launches the software application 107 at the start of a remote meting. Next, each client computer 100 may connect to the designated host computer 410. When a meeting participant updates his or her image 210, the updated image 210 may be sent to the designated host computer 410 to be distributed to the rest of the team.

Figure 5 illustrates a pure peer-to-peer model of the system 50. Each computer 100 launches the software application 107 at the start of a remote meting. Each computer 100 can be a host computer as well as a client computer. A client computer may connect to a host computer closest in location. When a meeting participant updates his or her image 210, the updated image 210 may be sent to the host computer 100, for example, the computer closest in location, to be distributed to the rest of the team.

1    Figure 6 is a flow chart illustrating the exemplary method 600 for communicating

2    expressive images 210 for meetings. After a remote meeting starts (block 602), a meeting

3    participant launches the software application 107 on his or her computer 100 (block 604).

4    The computer 100 then connects with a server 310, a designated host computer 410 or a

5    host computer closest in location (block 606). The meeting participant views multiple

6    self images 210 stored in a storage device (block 608) and selects a self image 210 from

7    the images collection (block 610). If the selection is not appropriate (block 612), the

8    method goes back to block 610. If the selection is appropriate (block 612), the meeting

9    participant communicates the selected image 210 to other meeting participants'

10   computers 100 over the network 118 (block 614). The meeting participant then

11   participates in the meeting (block 616). During the meeting, each meeting participant

12   observes other meeting participants' images 210 (block 618). If the meeting continues

13   (block 620), the meeting participant determines if the self image 210 is still appropriate

14   (block 622). If yes, the meeting participant continues to participant in the meeting (block

15   616). However, if the self image 210 is no longer appropriate, the meeting participant

16   selects another self image from the collection of images (block 610), and continues to

17   participant in the meeting (block 616). If the meeting ends (block 620), the meeting

18   participant closes the software application 107 on his or her computer 100 (block 624)

19   and the method concludes (block 626).

20   While the system and method for communicating expressive images for meetings

21   have been described in connection with an exemplary embodiment, those skilled in the art

22   will understand that many modifications in light of these teachings are possible, and this

23   application is intended to cover any variations thereof.